

Women have been fighting for years to attain pay parity in the workforce, but employer discrimination and legal loopholes have prevented them from achieving that goal. On January 9, 2009, under the leadership of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the House of Representatives opened its legislative session by passing two critical bills that demonstrate the incoming Congress' dedication to equality and justice, the [Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act](#) and the [Paycheck Fairness Act](#).

Lilly Ledbetter was an employee at the Goodyear tire plant in Alabama for nearly 20 years. Upon her retirement, she discovered that she had been consistently paid less than her male counterparts. She filed a lawsuit against Goodyear, but the Supreme Court dismissed her claim in 2007 based on a misguided interpretation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that severely restricted the rights of employees to challenge unlawful pay discrimination. The unfortunate reality - one not acknowledged by the Supreme Court in its ruling - is that the kind of pay discrimination Ms. Ledbetter suffered takes many years to become evident due to the secrecy that frequently surrounds salary information. The Ledbetter Fair Pay Act codifies the previous interpretation of the law by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the courts, recognizing that every discriminatory paycheck is a new violation of the law for which an employee can file a claim, so that no other woman will have to suffer the same injustice.

Unfortunately, women in the United States still earn only 77 cents to every dollar that men earn. To rectify this, the Paycheck Fairness Act will strengthen the Equal Pay Act and close loopholes that have allowed employers to avoid responsibility for discriminatory pay. It requires employers to show that any pay disparity is explicitly job-related and consistent with business necessity; it further modernizes the original law by allowing workers to compare pay for the same job with the same employer at different worksites in the same county and it protects employees who discuss salary information from retaliation by their employer. The Paycheck Fairness Act also provides assistance to employers and employees by enhancing outreach and training efforts to work with employers in order to eliminate pay disparities and creating a grant program to help strengthen the negotiation skills of girls and women.

I am a proud cosponsor of the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Paycheck Fairness Act, and I am pleased that the 111th Congress has moved so quickly to pass these bills to help advance the decades-long struggle for equality in the workplace by women and minorities. You can be sure I will continue to support legislation to promote equality as this Congress moves forward.